

BANTHA TRACKS



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NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICIAL STAR WARS FAN CLUB

INTERVIEW: IRVIN KERSHNER

Last summer, prior to his departure for London, we interviewed Irvin Kershner ("Kersh" to his friends and associates) about his background and about what he expected to encounter as the Director of *The Empire Strikes Back*. The following is an excerpt from that interview.

SW I haven't been able to find a lot of background material on you.

IK I'm an unknown man. I stay away from mass media as much as I can. It's a choice that I make. I don't think that people have to know about me. All you do is sell yourself and I'm not interested in that.

SW Tell me a little about your background and how you got into filmmaking.

IK I was a musician first, a classical musician. I studied violin, viola, and composition. I played professionally, but decided that I didn't want to be a musician, so I went into painting and sculpture. Later I decided I was not going to be a painter, so I turned to photography and became quite successful. I was being published and had exhibits all over the world. Then by chance I met Dean Croen, the Dean of Communications at USC. He wanted me to teach there, so I started teaching photography. It was at USC that I became interested in movies for the first time and began taking courses.

SW When was this?

IK This was in 1949. I got into documentaries after that. I directed and photographed hundreds of them. Finally, I came back from two years in the Middle East making films and got into television. I did a documentary series on television, *Paul Coates' Confidential File*. It was the first real documentary show that was syndicated all over the country. This was on in about 1953-55. Then I made my first feature, *Stake Out On Dope Street*. That was it. I just started working and doing my thing.

SW What brought you into doing features?

IK They wouldn't let me in the Cameraman's Union, the Editing Union, or the Art Director's Union, so I said there's only one thing to do—direct. I co-wrote a film, raised the money and directed it. I used to travel with the vice squad for *Confidential File* and I knew a lot about dope addiction and addicts. I thought, why not do a film that used my knowledge. It cost \$30,000, complete. It was a very successful venture. I just continued making films and trying to do my own type of film, which was outside of the establishment most of the time.

SW What type of film do you think is your type?

IK Up until about four years ago, my type of film was the small, intimate film—a film that dealt with social issues, human drives and needs. Every director at one point, coming out of the background that I came of—the university and documentaries—hopes for a film where you have a degree of honesty, a degree of truth. This was the kick I was on. It's much of the style making a realistic, human film as it is making a *Star Wars*. They are both stylistic. One appears to be real and one to be hyper-real, but they are both simply a style. But you find that there is a small audience and you cannot reach a small audience, because of the large cost of advertising and distribution, the studios feel that for the same amount, you can sell something that is more commercial.

SW So you decided that economics forced you away from the small intimate film and into the more commercial?

IK And the crazy way it took longer to make the small, intimate film than it did the big commercial films. *The Flim Flam Man* took me one year from script through editing and distribution. *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* took me almost three years. I'm beginning to enjoy making bigger films and films for a wider audience. One of the reasons I did *Raid On Entebbe* with Peter Finch and Charles Bronson is because I wanted to work faster and reach a bigger audience. It was a three-hour film shot in 32 days. Then I did *Return of a Man Called Horse*. I felt it was a chance to show the spiritual development of the American Indian which had never been done before. On *Eyes of Laura Mars* the script was developed before I came into it. I did a quick rewrite, then shot the whole picture and edited it. I'm working on my own projects right now. One of them is a huge film which takes place over 1,000 years ago and is full of recognizable characters.

SW This is after *The Empire Strikes Back*?

IK Right.



SW How did you get involved with *The Empire Strikes Back*?

IK George and Gary asked me if I was willing to undertake it. I thought about it overnight, thought about the pros and cons, and finally said, "yes, I'd love it." I'm glad I'm doing it.

SW It's a little harder this time because you've got a base that you're working from, that a lot of people are strongly attached to.

IK Well, I'm respecting that base; I'm not walking away from it. All the characters are there. The story is really an ongoing story. The bad guys are certainly better defined. The base is stable and we're just building another story.

SW How do you expect *The Empire Strikes Back* to be different from *Star Wars*?

IK As I said, the story is an ongoing one and has some new characters. It has a great deal of action. Well, we have a wonderful active ending also, which I can't tell you about but it will be different.

SW Do you expect *The Empire Strikes Back* to be a superficial picture?

IK Absolutely not. It's a very profound picture. It's a very deep picture, but on one level it's beautifully simple and on one level it's a delight. It's simple, it's clear, it's easy to read, and below that, it's supported by some wonderful ideas and wonderful feelings. Some of the effects have never been tried before. There are not just spaceships going through space. The people are very well defined and interesting, including the robots. In the first *Star Wars* you had to figure out who everybody was, but now you'll have instant recognition. Now I can play with further complexities of the characters. I can make things funnier more easily. I can make danger more easily because you already love these people. So I'm going to take advantage of the familiarity—and use it. By the way, you will like the story of *The Empire Strikes Back*. It's very exciting, I guarantee it. I love it.

SW How do you feel about the principal cast members?

IK I think they are all highly individualistic. Harrison is terrific. I think that Mark has terrific qualities—ingeniousness and eagerness. I think that Carrie is sweet and has an interesting strength, without being petulant. We do a lot more with C-3PO, R2-D2, and Chewbacca in this film, plus new characters and new creatures. George is very funny and we've had a ball. We've had some great sessions and laying out things. He can get very excited.

SW What do you feel about the science fiction field in terms of motion pictures?

IK I happen to love science fiction and I've been reading science fiction since I was a kid. I feel that, in the past, science fiction pictures have not been done too well, except for *2001*. Stanley (Kubrick) attempted something that no one else attempted—to do it right. Usually science fiction pictures have been cheapies and have been sort of little soap operas. There are often interesting stories. I think that *2001: A Space Odyssey* was a very interesting science fiction film; so was *Forbidden Planet*. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was good current science fiction—at the time it was a very good idea. The science fiction pictures that are uninteresting are the ones that depend on hardware, except for *2001*. The ones that depend on ideas are exciting, and science fiction offers a way of probing contemporary problems, contemporary sensibilities, and doing them in such a way that won't frighten you because it's not the real world, so you can say and do and explore any area. Of course, I feel *Star Wars* is as much fairy tale as it is science fiction—even a little more, and that the fairy tale is a very exciting aspect because fairy tales deal with universal morality, universal concerns, universal emotions, and universal fears and that's why *Star Wars* is so beautiful because it deals with those almost lyrical fairy tale aspects of experience. That's why, in any country, you can read and understand it.

SW Well, the fans will be very pleased that you are a science fiction fan.

IK I've read tons of it.

SW Your background does not reflect science fiction or, for that matter, much in the way of an action/adventure film.

IK But, if you'll look in my films, you'll see some terrific action/adventure sequences. I have just stayed away from that type of picture. But I love to do action/adventure, and I certainly know how to do it. I have just preferred not to do them, that's all. I like to get into people.

SW That's important. If you can capture the people at the same time as the action...

IK That's what we are going to do!

Now that Kersh has been at work for several months, actually working with the cast and crew, we asked him to provide us with a final comment—one that might help us to understand the pressures he is under. This was his reply.

IK: To do a good story on film is a challenge, to make a world on film is a miracle. The other day I found myself talking to my garbage pail. I couldn't understand why its top didn't close when I asked it to.

"EMPIRE" PROGRESS REPORT

Work on the sequel to *Star Wars* is proceeding at a dizzying pace both at the EMI-Elstree Studios in London, where principal photography has been taking place, and at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) in Northern California, where most of the special effects work is done.

Principal photography began in Norway on March 5, 1979. On March 6, there was an avalanche. While this avalanche did not delay filming very much, it did cause some difficulties. Instead of coming in via snow-truck, people had to be helicoptered in.

After work was completed in Norway, the cast and crew returned to the relative safety and comfort of the English studios, 17 miles outside of London.

Production continued there for several months, finally wrapping in early August. Meanwhile, work on the construction and filming of the special effects is expected to continue until sometime in early March, 1980.

Amazing things are being done in *The Empire Strikes Back*—some things more fantastic than the sights seen in *Star Wars*. Imagine, if you will, a full size version of the Millennium Falcon. This version of the sleek-lined craft weighs 40 tons, stands 16 feet high, and has a diameter of 60 feet with a mandible giving it an overall length of 80 feet. And it lifts off under its own power. Or a sound stage so large that two different scenes can be filmed simultaneously without interfering with one another.



Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, and Harrison Ford are returning to recreate their roles of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia Organa, and Han Solo. Also returning are Dave Prowse (Darth Vader), Anthony Daniels (C-3PO), Kenny Baker (R2-D2), and Peter Mayhew (Chewbacca). Joining our band of adventurers will be Billy Dee Williams as Lando Calrissian, an old friend of Han Solo's who now runs the mining colony of Bespin.

Irwin Kershner will be working as Director (see "Interview: Irwin Kershner" elsewhere in this issue), with Gary Kurtz returning as Producer, and George Lucas acting as Executive Producer. John Williams is once again doing the music.

Taking over as Special Effects Supervisor will be Brian Johnson, whose previous credits include *2001: A Space Odyssey* (working with Doug Trumbull), *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, *The Return of the Pink Panther*, the television series *Space: 1999*, and the recent blockbuster motion picture, *Alien*. Brian will be working at the ILM headquarters in Northern California.

The screenplay was written by Leigh Brackett, a long-time master of science fiction, as well as a top Hollywood scriptwriter, and Lawrence Kasdan, a highly talented newcomer to screenwriting.

Lucasfilm Ltd. and the Official Star Wars Fan Club are sponsoring slide show presentations on *The Empire Strikes Back* at several science fiction and comic book conventions. You can see it at one of the following 1979 conventions: August 23-27, Season/World Science Fiction Convention in Brighton, England; October 5-7, Windycon in Chicago, Illinois; and November 23-25, Creation Con in New York, New York. Later presentations will be announced in the next issue of *Bantha Tracks*.

The Empire Strikes Back will be released in London on May 17, 1980, and in the United States and Canada on May 18, 1980.

"STAR WARS" COMIC STRIP

Appearing in over 300 newspapers across the country, the "Star Wars" comic strip has become a hit with fans everywhere. One of the major reasons for the comic strip's success is the terrific work of artist Russ Manning.

Russ was chosen over dozens of possible artists as the best suited to depict in comic strip form the characters and the universe created by George Lucas.

Best known in recent years for his work on the "Tarzan" comic strip, Russ previously wrote and illustrated his own science fiction comic book, "Magnus, Robot Fighter," for Gold Key Comics.

Currently, the comic strip is running two separate stories, with one appearing Monday through Saturday, and the other appearing on Sundays only. The current daily story will end on September 8, and the current Sunday story will end on September 9. Starting on September 10, a new story will start which will be running seven days a week.

This exciting new story is being written by Steve Gerber. Steve worked with Marvel Comics for six years, and is best known for creating and writing "Howard the Duck." Future stories will feature the work of other writers including Roy Thomas, who currently writes "Conan, the Barbarian" comic books and who, until recently, was editor-in-chief of the entire Marvel Comics Group line.

If you enjoy the "Star Wars" comic strip, write your local paper letting them know. Newspapers use the letters they receive as a barometer to tell them how people feel about each comic strip, and whether or not to continue carrying it. If you want to see the "Star Wars" comic strip continue in your paper, please remember, send your local paper a letter telling them.

Speaking of local papers, starting soon your local paper will be running information on a cartoon contest, similar to the one run by the Official Star Wars Fan Club. This contest will be run through the "Star Wars" comic strip, with prizes being awarded at the local level by each paper, as well as big, national prizes.

FAN CLUB REORGANIZATION

As with any new venture, we have experienced many unexpected problems and complications. Some of the things we thought would work haven't, and some of the things we've done as an afterthought have become our biggest successes. We've undergone some transitions and suffered through some growing pains, and now feel that we can offer what we set out to do last year.

We're going to do everything possible to make this fan club work. We want it to be a forum of communication for Star Wars fans of all ages. Not just for children. Not just for adults. Write to us and let us know what you want and what you don't want. Help us make this the organization you wanted it to be when you joined.

The Official Star Wars Fan Club is not being run to make money—it's being run as a service to those fans of Star Wars who care enough and are interested enough to join. The money taken in through membership fees will be going right out again as benefits. Very soon, we are going to start offering special, limited edition merchandise, available only to club members. This will include special cast-and-crew items such as tee-shirt transfers, decals, and patches. While these items won't be free, we will be selling them at as near to cost as possible, because of the membership fees covering the overhead of running the Fan Club. We'll also be able to run more contests and competitions, such as the Cartoon Contest mentioned elsewhere in this issue.

And don't worry about renewing your memberships. Because we feel responsible for the problems that developed with the Fan Club, we are extending everyone's membership. The date printed on your mailing label will tell you when your membership will expire. No one's membership will expire for at least six months.

For those people who haven't been assigned a Force number, look at your mailing label. Use that number whenever you write to us, particularly if you are moving. This number helps us serve you better. And let us know your new address if you move. When you write to us, for any reason, please either type your letter or print it neatly.

Next issue, the Question-and-Answer column will be returning. If you have any questions about Star Wars or The Empire Strikes Back, send them to us now.

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CARTOON CONTEST WINNERS

Earlier this year, the Star Wars Fan Club sponsored a Cartoon Contest. The rules were simple—any member could enter by sending in one or more one-panel cartoons based on Star Wars. The entries were judged based on their humorous content and not on how well they were drawn.

First Prize was an all-expense-paid trip for two to England and a visit to the set of the Star Wars sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Second Prize was an all-expense-paid trip for two to the United States premiere of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Third prize was a set of four signed and numbered, limited edition lithographs by Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston.

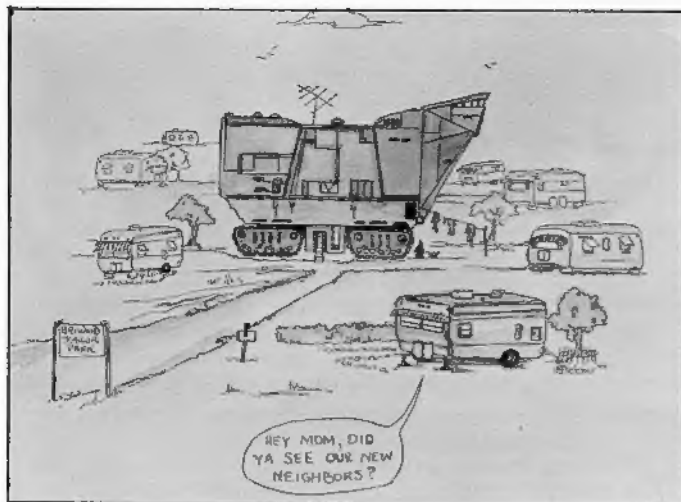
A panel of judges went through the thousands and thousands of entries and narrowed the selection down to 10 finalists. These 10 cartoons were then sent to George Lucas, who made the final decision.



First prize winner, Matthew Pak (a college freshman at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia), took his mother, also a Star Wars Fan Club member, with him on his prize trip to London. Along with a tour of the sets, Prop department, Special Effects Shop, and Make-up Department, Matthew and his mother were treated to a special luncheon at the EMI-Elstree Studios commissary with Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford, and Peter Mayhew. By winning the contest, Matthew and his mother have become something of celebrities. Articles appeared about them in both their hometown paper and in Matthew's college paper.



When we asked Matthew how he liked his trip, he replied, "Great! I can't think of words to describe it. It's amazing!" And about his mother's reaction, he added, "She was stunned."



Second prize went to Mary Jo Fletcher of Ridgewood, New Jersey. Upon receiving notification of winning, Mary Jo sent the fan club a lovely card she drew herself. "Your letter informing me that I have second prize in the Official Star Wars Cartoon Contest has been one of the happiest moments in my life! I had been hoping for some kind of reply, and when I saw your envelope my heart almost stopped."



Guy Haines, Jr., of Clear Springs, Maryland, received the Third Prize. Guy is 24 years old and a part-time college student. He's had his prize of the four limited edition lithographs framed and has them hanging up in his home.

The other finalists were Shirley Barrett of San Diego, California; Jim Lambert of Urbana, Ohio; Ron Mileti of Rocky River, Ohio; Gary Griffith of Davenport, Florida; Todd Nix of Lubbock, Texas; Benny Park of Alameda, California; and Robert Ronning of Thousand Oaks, California.

INTRODUCING: BOBA FETT

Not much is known about Boba Fett. He wears part of the uniform of the Imperial Shocktroopers, warriors from the olden time. Shocktroopers came from the far side of the galaxy and there aren't many of them left. They were wiped out by the Jedi Knights during the Clone Wars. Whether he was a shocktrooper or not is unknown. He is the best bounty hunter in the galaxy, and cares little for whom he works—as long as they pay.

Part of what makes Boba Fett as good as he is are the special modifications he has made to his Shocktrooper's armor. Examine the equipment and you'll know what makes him the best.



- 1 Flame Thrower and Dart Gun
- 2 Rocket Pack Controls
- 3 Rocket Pack
- 4 Camel View & Finder
- 5 Grappling Hook
- 6 Digital Life Support System Readout
- 7 Wookiee Scalps
- 8 Utility Gun Belt
- 9 Storage Pack
- 10 Knee Darts
- 11 Tools
- 12 Climbing Spikes
- 13 Laser Rifle

Add years of practice and experience to this list of equipment and you have quite a formidable enemy.

Boba Fett first appeared on *The Star Wars Holiday Special* late last year, in the employ of Darth Vader. He will be returning in *The Empire Strikes Back*, still in Darth Vader's employ, and still after Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Princess Leia, and the leaders of the Rebellion.

John Barry, the British film designer who received an Academy Award for his work on *Star Wars*, died June 1, 1979, in London at age 43. He was directing second unit on *The Empire Strikes Back*, the continuation of the *Star Wars* saga, at the time of his death.

Barry was born in London and began his career as a draftsman on the epic film, *Cleopatra*. The quality of his early work soon earned him designer status on the Stanley Kubrick film, *A Clockwork Orange*. His credits include *Superman* and *Saturn III*, for which he wrote the original story. It is currently before the cameras at Shepperton Studios in London.

Upon receiving the American film industry's highest honor in 1977 for his set designs on *Star Wars*, Barry said, "It was without a doubt the high point of my career as a designer. The number of foreign film technicians who have been honored in this way illustrates the generosity of the Academy and the truly international nature of the industry."

Gary Kurtz, producer of *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, said of Barry: "We all mourn John Barry. Apart from his exceptional talent, to which the success of *Star Wars* owes much, he was the most lovable of men, who carried very lightly and disarmingly his great wealth of experience and creativity."

Just a few days before his death, he told an interviewer on the set of *The Empire Strikes Back*, "I'm happy to be with the *Star Wars* company again. It's like coming home."

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STAR WARS IS BACK!

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